thought drifted away and he was utterly alone, with no love or hope or rage or terror to company him. That was wrong, somehow it shouldn't be like this. He tried to resist and couldn't, floating, alone ....

...and then he was no longer alone. Something reached for him, faltered slightly, gripped and pulled, drawing him out of the deep. There was a point of light in the blackness, an eddy in the vast nothingness. Another consciousness. Life.

?????

Calm. A feeling of reassurance. Spock, of course.

Of course.

What are you doing here?

Coming after you.

The hell you are. Get out.

Not without you.

Nothing to push against. Damn. Try harder. "Dynamic personality," wasn't that the phrase? Then how come a dynamic personality couldn't enforce the privacy of his own mind?

Please, Spock.

Obstinate silence.

Spock, I'm dying. Please get out.

You are making this difficult.

Good.

Do you want to die, then?

That's a loaded question.

Answer it.

No, I don't want to die. Satisfied?

Not quite. Will you cooperate?

I will not. Can't you understand?

I understand that you are being illogical.

I don't want my life at the risk of yours.

The darkness thinned and whipped away like fog, and he was back on Gamma Trianguli VI. Spock lay in the gray dirt with half a dozen poison thorns lodged in his chest, and an iron fist closed cold around his own heart.... The fist was still there, still tightening as he watched Spock's straight back vanish with a snap of the cabin door, and the words echoed in his mind, as they would echo as long as he lived, "I'm sorry, Mr. Spock." Sorrysorrysorry, the echoes mocked him, it wasn't enough, it didn't compensate for all he would have liked to say and now never could say, sorrysorry-sorry.... And still he was not free of it, as the harpy in his body pronounced the illegal death sentence, oh God, she couldn't be content with destroying only me....

The presence in his mind recoiled before the emotional blast. He felt a second's sharp, alien astonishment, a fear of--what? Acknowledgement? Discovery? He tried to catch hold of it, but it was gone....

In its place was authority, and a touch of anger.

Jim, stop fighting me.

No. I won't be responsible.

"Spock! Spock!" Faint, hollow, the cry came from immeasurable far in space and time. "Break it off! You're making things worse! Spock!"

Understood.